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ABSTRACT

The Mexican educational system is highly centralized, with all plans, programs, textbooks, curriculum materials, and teacher training programs controlled by the Ministry of Education. Each teacher is required to follow a set program, and enforcement is assured through a corps of inspectors who are responsible for the schools. The official method of reading instruction is the global method with structural analysis. First grade students are taught the sight words for the colors, parts of the face and body, drinks, fruits, and common animals. Word parts are taught by the end of the first grade and the student can read with oral fluency. Second grade skills include inferences, cause, sequence, and principle ideas in the total selection. Study skills using dictionaries, newspapers, encyclopedias, and alphabetical order are introduced in the third grade. Grammar, advanced comprehension, and study skills are the main concerns of the fourth grade. Fifth grade skills focus on interpretation of prose and poetry, analogies, grammar, and study skills. In the sixth grade, vocabulary and oral work center on refinement of the language, and students are expected to learn figurative language, scientific language, and metaphors. They are also expected to read to an audience, comment on stories in the text, and react to stories, prose, and verse. (FL)

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PUBLIC PRIMARY READING INSTRUCTION IN MEXICO

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PUBLIC PRIMARY READING INSTRUCTION IN MEXICO

Over 7.2 million people of Mexican origin who are concentrated in the southwestern portion of the United States and approximately 3,000 illegal immigrants who enter the U.S. each night present a major challenge to the educational system of this country.(4) Of this number, 1.6 million Spanish speakers make metropolitan Los Angeles the world's second largest Spanish speaking city. Even though there are so many Mexicans in the U.S., there is very little information available on the components of the Mexican educational system and especially the method of teaching reading and language arts. This information is important for correct placement of students and to help in determining the expectations of Mexican parents in terms of our school system.

The purpose of this paper is to present a general overview of the Mexican public educational system and to describe the reading and language arts program used in grades 1-6 as presented in the official documents of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (the Ministry of Public Education).

The Mexican Educational System

The concept of universal education for the people of Mexico was not practiced until 1921. Prior to 1856, the Catholic Church ran most of the schools with the exception of a few schools based on the teachings of Lancaster. In 1856, under the presidency of Benito Juarez, the federal government took over the schools and education became a function of the state. However, the Catholic Church continued to run the schools, thus, the status quo was maintained. The official statistics for 1910 indicated that (1) more than two-thirds of the total 1910 population could neither

read nor write, (2) fewer than one-fourth of the school-age population were enrolled in school, and (3) education in the rural areas was almost completely neglected.(12)

The federal education movement began in 1921. Many anti-illiteracy campaigns were inaugurated in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. From 1946-52, 5,069 new primary schools were added to the 12,000 already in existence. As of the 1976-77 school year, there were 53,571 primary schools with an enrollment of 12,148,221 students and the literacy rate was approximately 80% of the population.(13)

Mexican education is highly centralized with all plans and programs, textbooks, and curriculum materials being written and approved by the Ministry of Public Education. The Secretario de Educación Pública is assisted by five sub-secretaries and each of these sub-secretaries has several departments under its authority. In terms of budget, this organizational structure for 1978-79 cost more than thirty-one million American dollars with primary school instruction consuming approximately 33% of the total.(2) Primary education is under the direction of the Secretario de Educación Basica who has two divisions for primary education: primary education in Mexico City and primary education in the states. Under the director of primary education in Mexico City are directors of the four divisions. These divisions are geographic and are designed to make administration of the 2,444 schools in Mexico City a bit easier. Each division is further divided into zones and there are inspectors who supervise the implementation of the official curriculum.

The schools are administered by a director who is responsible for dealing with parents, the central office, and public relations. Day-to-day operation of the school is handled by a secretary who is a certified teacher.

Schools usually have six grades and are divided into sections. School starts at either 8:00 a.m. or 2:00 p.m. and lasts until 12:30 or 6:30 p.m. Students only attend one shift, but teachers often teach for two shifts. The students learn language, mathematics, natural science, social science, technical education, art, and physical education.

Teachers are appointed and they have tenure from the time they are first hired and can only be removed through resignations, abandonment of employment, mental health, physical disability, or death. The teacher is paid a base salary plus a cost of living adjustment depending upon where they live. In order to be a teacher, the candidate must have completed six years of elementary school and three years of secondary school. Next, the candidate spends three years in the normal school and then takes the state examinations in the fourth year.

Textbooks are provided free to all students. They are developed and printed in Mexico City and all teachers are required to use them. In addition to the textbooks, each teacher receives the Plan y Programas book which lists all of the objectives plus activities for the objectives. The teacher also receives a Teacher's Manual which explains the rational for each activity.

Reading Instruction in Mexico

In the first grade Teacher's Manual for the Mexican primary schools, there is a criticism for each of the standard methods of reading instruction (phonetic, global, and eclectic). According to the manual, the phonetic approach produces a situation whereby the students do not understand what is read.(1) The global method is criticized because it makes little use of the sounds of Spanish which are relatively regular in terms of pronunciation,

spelling, and writing. Lastly, the eclectic method is criticized because there is not a synthesis between the phonetic and global elements, i.e., they remain as distinct entities. Mexican educators are currently using a system called "methodo global de analisis estructural" which combines the global system, structural analysis, and continuous associations which include speaking, writing, and reading the same words. All of the textbooks in all subject areas have been written to reflect this system. For example, in reading, sight words are taught first and in math, models are used to present the total concept. After the whole is presented, the component parts are studied.

Before discussing the actual curriculum, it would be prudent to consider the relationship between reading and writing in Spanish. It is generally believed that Spanish possesses one of the highest correlations between the spoken sound and the written symbol.(3) There are twenty-nine letters and twenty-four spoken units. The implications of this regular grapheme-phoneme relationship are important. This may be the reason why little time is spent on teaching spelling and the vocabulary and content of the textbooks are not controlled by a graded word list as is found in basal readers used in the United States.

In the official curriculum, reading is an integral part of language study. Modiano summarized the program used prior to 1972:

> The Federal and State language curriculum is outlined in the Federal textbooks, workbooks, and instructional manuals. The first year of school includes an introduction to reading, primarily phonic in approach, beginning with the mastery of vowel sounds, then consonants, blends, the order of presentation from easiest to most difficult. By the end of the first year students are expected to know the entire alphabet and be able to read by sounding out words. They should also be able to form all letters in cursive script, to know the use of capitals and small letters, also punctuation marks such as periods, question marks, and exclamation points and to understand some simple grammatical rules dealing with gender and other suffix changes.

> In the second year, silent reading is introduced as is reading comprehension and the interpretation of written material. Handwriting should be improved, the student should be able to take simple dictation, free composition is begun, previous work is reviewed, and more grammatical rules are included. There is a review of the semi-irregular letters in Spanish orthography, accents, and more punctuation marks.(5)

In 1972, the entire curriculum was revised. Commissions were established and new plan books, teacher's manuals, and textbooks were printed. The plan books (Plan y Programas de Estudio para la Educación Primaria) are written for each of the six grades and contain objectives and activities for each month of the school year. The objectives and activities are referenced to pages in the textbooks, teacher's manual, and the student workbooks. In the case of physical education and arts and crafts, there is a description of the activities to be accomplished. The teacher's books detail the exact procedure to be used and justify the reasons for using the procedure. Textbooks are the property of the students and they are provided without cost to both students in public and private schools.

First Grade

There are three parts to the system of teaching reading which are: (1) preparation, (2) learning to read and write, and (3) consolidating the gains.

The vast majority of students enter the first grade at six years old without pre-school or readiness training.(8) During the first months of the first grade, reading readiness is taught and the students work on body coordination, distinguishing objects by size and shape, observation, hand-eye coordination, tracing letters, and developing the ability to describe things. They also learn muscle control and perceptual activities. Also, during the first month, the students are expected to learn

the colors: red, green, yellow, blue, black, and white. A typical lesson would be for the teacher to write the following on the blackboard:

el es rojo. (The shoe is red.)

la es roja. (The window is red.)

After the teacher writes this, the students copy the examples in their notebooks. Individual students are then asked to read from the board. Successful answers are rewarded by either teacher acknowledgment or by applause from the other students in the class. This type of assignment would normally take about thirty minutes.

During the second month, the students continue with readiness activities and they learn the parts of the body and the parts of the face. Each phoneme is also learned, but it is learned as a part of a syllable rather than in isolation.

The students trace letters, work on oral skills, and learn the names of animals during the third month. Oral activities are emphasized. Students are required to tell about a dialogue, memorize brief selections, or tell about a picture.

In the fourth and fifth months, the students continue to learn the phonemes, consonants, vowels, and syllables. The remainder of the first grade deals with practicing the rest of the letters, doing oral comprehension, and reading short stories. By the end of the first grade, the students are expected to know how to read.

The students are also taught how to print the letters. Since 1972, cursive writing has not been taught in the public schools. This means that students graduating from Mexican public schools can only print.

The first grade objectives are accomplished through two books, both of which contain many pictures and are in color. The first book

contains pictures which the students color or cut up and paste in a different part of the book (Libro Recortable) and the second book is a book of poems, stories, and short biographies of famous Mexican leaders. Both books are referenced to the objectives in the Plans and Programs book.(6)

Second Grade

In the second grade, readiness activities are continued. Students trace letter combinations and they work on visual discrimination, two syllable words, and the difficult phonemes and blends such as /z/, /s/, /c/, /gu/, /k/, /y/, and /h/. The graphemes /ll/, /y/, /b/, and /v/ are studied. At this level, the students learn the names of the letters.

Comprehension is introduced in several different ways. In some classes the students are required to write a dictation each day. Questions are then asked about the dictation. In other classes, the students read stories and then answer the questions. Paramount is oral comprehension and fluency; thus the students are expected to note punctuation when reading orally, do choral poetry, and paraphrase written selections. Questions are asked by the teacher with the intent of teaching inferences, cause, sequence, and principal ideas. It is important to note that the students are expected to find the principal ideas in the entire selection rather than the main idea in each paragraph. From the observations and discussions with teachers, it seems that oral fluency is more important than comprehension. In addition to the above, language skills such as periods, question marks, nouns, subjects, predicates, and adjectives are introduced.(7)

Third Grade

The third grade is the year when advanced skills are introduced. Reading readiness activities focus on sophisticated observation and description exercises, classification, sequence, and oral description of what is observed. Comprehension and study skills are stressed during this year. Skills such as endings for stories, main ideas in paragraphs, summaries, comparison of stories, identification of main characters, interpretation of proverbs, and best titles are stressed as well as reading instructions, locating dates in magazines, dictionary skills, newspapers, alphabetical order, sequence, and the use of encyclopedias.

Types of sentences and proper punctuation are stressed in the grammar portion of the course. In addition, the parts of speech and agreement are taught. In two of the classrooms visited, the teachers were working on the types of sentences. The exercises consisted of writing in the notebooks and answering questions from the teacher. Dictation and board work also played an important part in the classrooms visited.

Oral activities are very important during the third grade. Students are again expected to read fluently, describe errors in drawings, summarize stories, tell experiences, do reports, use dramatics to perfect oral language, and understand oral directions. The oral reading stress is on pronouncing phonemes that do not have a high sound symbol correlation. Examples are: /m/ after /pr/, and /rr/, /b/ and /v/, /y/ and /ll/, and /c/ and /q/.(8)

Fourth Grade

In the fourth grade, the oral reading objectives are cut in half and the language skill objectives are more than doubled. Oral work

consists of narrating stories, description, techniques of interviews, and rhyming. On the other hand, the language objectives consist of the parts of speech, the nominal construction, transformation of nouns, plurals, accents, conjunctions, and tense. In addition to the above, the students are expected to know the difference between fiction and non-fiction.

Study skills taught are parts of a book, diagrams, newspapers, magazines, dictionary skills, maps, logical relationships, bibliographies, and logical operations.

Comprehension skills include reading complete stories, finding the main character, main ideas, central theme, secondary characters, cause-effect, and context clues.(9)

Fifth Grade

In the fifth grade, language skills are reduced and study skills are increased. The students are expected to work with popular materials, edit themes, know the nominal construction, utilize conjunctions and prepositions, know the difference between descriptive and narrative, develop rhymes, know several forms of objects and modifiers, do letter writing, and study verbs, adverbs, and tense. In addition, the students do reports on sports and work on rhyming.

Under the heading of study skills, the students are expected to learn how to take notes, use the encyclopedia, use newspapers, use graphs, plans, thermometers, and maps. The concept of logical relationships is also studied. Each year some of the same concepts are taught, but they become increasingly more difficult.

The concept of analogy is taught as well as the pronounciation of the following graphemes: b and v, que, gui, and gue. Students are expected to locate stressed syllables and know morphemes. Comprehension

skills consist of summarizing, principal ideas, interpretation of prose, and poetry.(10)

Sixth Grade

In the sixth grade, language skills are the most important. The student is expected to master the subject, predicate, nominal construction, capital letter rules, direct and indirect objects, tense accent, comma rules, style, and the demonstrative pronouns.

Comprehension skills are focused on relationships with analogies, logical summaries, interpreting illustrations, and main ideas. Study skills complement the study of comprehension because the students are required to learn organizing and recording information. Dictionaries, plans, and phone directories as well as map reading are mastered.

The vocabulary and oral work center on refinement of the language. The students are expected to learn figurative language, homonyms, scientific language, synonyms, and metaphors. They are also expected to read to an audience, comment on stories in the text, do narratives, and react to stories, prose, and verse.(11)

Summary

The Mexican educational system is highly centralized with all plans, programs, textbooks, curriculum materials, and teacher training programs controlled by the Ministry of Education. Each teacher is required to follow a set program and enforcement is assured through a corps of inspectors which are responsible for the schools.

The official method of reading instruction is the "metodo global de analisis estructural" which is translated as the global method with structural analysis. First grade students are taught the sight words for

the colors, parts of the face and body, drinks, fruits, and common animals. Word parts are taught and by the end of the first grade, the student can read with oral fluency. Second grade skills include inferences, cause, sequence, and principal ideas in the total selection. Study skills using dictionaries, newspapers, encyclopedias, and alphabetical order are introduced in the third grade. Grammar is the main concern of the fourth grade as well as advanced comprehension and study skills. Fifth grade skills focus on interpretation of prose and poetry, analogies, grammar, and study skills. In the sixth grade, vocabulary and oral work center on refinement of the language. Students are expected to learn figurative language, scientific language, and metaphors. They are expected to read to an audience, comment on stories in the text, and react to stories, prose, and verse.

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